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## More Militias?: Déjà vu Double Plus with the Proposed ‘Afghan Territorial Army’ [Part 1]

[indrastra.com/2017/09/More-Militias-Proposed-Afghanistan-Territorial-Army-003-09-2017-0034.html](http://indrastra.com/2017/09/More-Militias-Proposed-Afghanistan-Territorial-Army-003-09-2017-0034.html)

By Kate Clark

via [Afghanistan Analysts Network](#)



*Image Attribute: An Afghan militia force member / Source: Dawn*

The Afghan government and its United States military backers are considering standing up a new militia force, an army version of the Afghan Local Police (ALP) and modeled on the Indian Territorial Army. Officials claim this is their only option if isolated communities are to be protected from insurgents. Human rights groups have reacted with shock. AAN's Kate Clark looks at the multiple, unhappy precedents for this force, but also at where militias have, occasionally, worked to defend communities, rather than abuse them. She considers the serious questions that would need to be answered before the government went ahead with this plan and also asks what it means for the third of a million-strong ANSF that a new militia is felt to be needed.

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*AAN has been told that President Ghani is currently considering a pilot project for the ATA in the Achin and Kot districts of Nangrahar, the heartland of the Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP) and the US/Afghan government fight against it. In a second dispatch, we will assess the viability of this pilot project using lessons learned from previous experiments with militias.*

*This dispatch is published as part of a joint three-year project by AAN, the Global Public Policy institute (GPPi), and the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani. The project explores the role and impact of militias, local or regional defense forces and other quasi-state forces in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, including mechanisms for foreign assistance to such actors. Funding is provided by the Netherlands Research Organisation.*

Many, including this author, could not believe their eyes when they read a [New York Times](#) piece on 15 September 2017 quoting un-named officials about a proposal to establish a new militia force for Afghanistan modeled after a combination of the ALP and the Indian Territorial Army. For many years now, there have been scathing critiques of both (1) and of other Afghan

militias including allegations that they engage in widespread abuses, undermine accountability, or simply do not work to protect the population. It seemed astonishing then that the Afghan government and US military would be planning to create another of these forces.

Yet, the proposal appears to be serious. It was followed up with other articles quoting named Afghan Ministry of Defence (MoD) officials; according to [The New York Times](#), [Tolo TV](#) and [AFP](#), the proposal is to establish 'village defense forces' in other words civilians who would be recruited locally and given arms to protect their areas. This new 'Afghan Territorial Army' (ATA) may include some 20,000 forces – that would be more than two-thirds the size of the ALP (now at 29,000 forces). One Afghan MoD official told AFF it will "operate under an army corps and will be used to fill the gaps." The spokesman for the ministry, Dawlat Waziri told Tolo:

*"People will be recruited from their areas, because they know their region and realize how to keep it ... The forces will not go from one place to another. It is almost the same as the Local Police, but there is a big difference." [This difference not explained in the report.]*

The New York Times reported that the move would regularise the use of "local militias" which it says the government has often turned to when "districts have come under Taliban attack and the regular forces [are] stretched." Pro-government militias have been increasingly used by Kabul since the completion of handover of security from international to national forces in 2014, both in Nangrahar and in the north (they were also raised before that – see AAN reporting [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)). Some militias have been badged as 'uprising forces'; others not. None have any status in Afghan law and their chains of command tend to be opaque, both factors which tend to foster abusive behavior. (2)

One aim of the ATA, it seems, would be to bring such militias under formal state control.

The role of these re-badged militias, according to The New York Times, would be "holding areas cleared by the regular army, whose units would take on a primarily offensive role." The new force would be cheaper than the national army, it said: "and more sustainable and accountable than the existing militias."

AAN understands the ATA proposal has the backing of the US military, Afghan ministry of defense and NATO Resolute Support and is now on President Ghani's table waiting for his final decision. However, reports say it was met with skepticism and disquiet by many of Afghanistan's major donors, particularly the European countries. They have maintained their refusal to support the Afghan Local Police because of concerns over funding militias, so it seems unlikely they would back the 'Afghan Territorial Army'. Human rights groups also immediately raised detailed concerns, founded on the experience of uncovering abuses by previous militia forces. [Human Rights Watch](#) warned that "the expansion of irregular forces could have enormously dangerous consequences for civilians."

## The ATA within Afghanistan's new military strategy

The reason for setting up the ATA – a force that is presented as replicating the ALP, but under MoD control (more on which, later) – has not been made clear. Officials have yet to reveal any difference in their role or make-up, except that they would be "better trained." Like the ALP, the ATA would be recruited locally and, we are told, not deployed elsewhere.

It is also not clear why the Afghan government and its US military backers want to stand up a new force at all when there are so very many Afghans under arms already. As of May 2017, (see [here](#)) there were a third of a million men and women – 336,000 – in the ANSF, of whom 180,000 are ANA and 156,000 ANP.

The ATA proposal needs to be seen within the new military strategy of President Ghani and General John Nicholson, commander of the U.S. and international forces in Afghanistan; this was backed by President Trump in a [speech](#) on 21 August 2017 (read about it in detail [here](#)). Its aim is to 'tilt' the war in Kabul's favor, with the aim of capturing back territory so that 80 per cent of the population is under Afghan government control. They want to eliminate Daesh and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan but have expressed no hope in defeating the Taliban (few predict that either side can achieve victory on the battlefield).

The key failure since the transition from international to national responsibility for security, which was completed at the end of 2014, has been the inability of the conventional elements of the ANA and ANP to hold territory against the Taliban and the ANA's inability to take offensive action to gain or re-gain territory. Because of that, Kabul has continued to lose territory to the Taliban and, to recapture it, Afghanistan's special forces been relied on, flown around the country and heavily overused. Despite their efforts, the land may be lost again as other army and police forces fail, yet again, to hold it. (AAN will be publishing a special despatch on the Afghan Special Forces, soon.) The scale of this failure can also be seen in monetary terms. SIGAR's latest

running total of US aid (alone) to the ANSF since 2001 is more than 73.5 billion dollars (see [here](#)).

One possible response to these failings would be to improve the effectiveness and morale of the conventional parts of the ANA and ANP, but doing so would take time – time that Nicholson and Ghani do not think they have. The fundamental problems of weak leadership, low morale, nepotism (and in the Ministry of Interior, at least, the buying of positions) and other forms of corruption would need time and determination and, in the case of the highly powerful and highly corrupt Mol, courage and political capital, to sort out. (The difference, one senior international officer told AAN, between the two ministries was that the problem with corruption in the MoD was dodgy contracts; in the Ministry of Interior, he said, “It is everything.” Read in detail about the Mol [here](#)). Reforms have started, particularly in the less problematic Ministry of Defence, but they will not result in a well-functioning (at least to the degree necessary) ANA and ANP anytime soon. However, the US wants to defeat Daesh this year, a timetable which may make short-term ‘solutions’ look more attractive.

## The ALP, a troubled history, and a somewhat better present

Because the declared model for the ANA is the ALP, it is worth looking in some detail at how that has worked and what lessons can be learned from it. The ALP was certainly not the first militia that central government or its backers set up to try to compensate for weaknesses in state forces; the practice goes back to PDPA president Babrak Karmal and his Soviet advisors, although they were more associated with his successor, Dr. Najibullah. Since 2001, the US military (and to a very limited extent, the UK and German armies, see [here](#)), as well as different Afghan stakeholders have repeatedly toyed with different models of standing up local militia forces, sometimes with a level of connection to Afghan national forces, sometimes not. On occasion, the Kabul government was not informed of these efforts, while at other times, it was centrally involved. For details of the post-2001 forces, see the appendix: A Brief History of Afghan Militias.

The immediate [precursors](#) to the ALP were established from 2009 onwards, as (mostly) US Special Operations Forces (SOF) experimented with creating local militias which they termed ‘village defense forces’. There was usually, but not always, some element of Afghan government buy-in. The US military hoped to stand up dependable, local forces in the face of a strong insurgency and a weak ANSF. In July 2010, Karzai who was against the militia forces reluctantly passed a law creating the ALP, which would ultimately absorb the majority of these local forces, both those stood up by international forces and a number of local militias answering to Afghan powerbrokers. The ALP was regularised to fall under Mol command in 2012, with local units answering to the district and provincial police chiefs. The ALP is now present in almost all Afghanistan’s provinces.

AAN and others [have](#), over the years, uncovered multiple instances of ALP units [abusing](#) the local population and being [co-opted](#) by strongmen and factions. Units portrayed as shining examples of locals taking security into their own hands and fighting the Taliban were revealed, with a little digging, to be violent towards civilians or cooperating with the Taliban or fighting their neighbors. (See examples [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)).

As a result of such investigations, the ALP gained a lasting reputation as an abusive militia force, at least among many researchers and human rights groups. However, the ALP has actually improved in recent years (see AAN reporting [here](#)) and always had a more mixed record than its reputation suggested. The unit within the Mol overseeing the ALP has undertaken reforms to improve its accountability – ensuring local policemen are paid, armed, exist and trained and holding individuals to account when they have committed crimes. There has also been a tightening up on their misuse, as private guards or being deployed away from their villages (abuses are more likely to occur away from home, particularly in ethnically mixed areas, against ‘other’ group). UNAMA’s tracking of abuses and violations suggest that the ALP is no worse than other Afghan forces, and in fact, in many cases appears to be causing fewer civilian casualties and engaging in less abuse. In its mid-year 2016 report, UNAMA only noted three incidents in which the 29,000-strong ALP had engaged in threats or harassment of the civilian population. There are grisly exceptions, however, with continuing accusations against some units of abuse, including murder, rape, and extortion. Where the ALP is bad, it is very bad.

There is some evidence, as well, that the ALP may be more effective than many have assumed. UNAMA said, for example, in its [2014 annual report](#) on the protection of civilians in the conflict that, “*Most communities reported improved security following ALP deployment.*” Also, as a forthcoming AAN dispatch will show, the Taliban have, from very early on, recognized the ALP as a major threat, especially in the south and east of Afghanistan, which has long served as the Taliban’s bedrock. This is precise because where the ALP works, it draws on the same community support as the Taliban. (3) (See also this rather more mixed picture of the force from the International Crisis Group from 2015 [here](#)), this assessment of Helmand’s security where ALP have played [a mixed role](#) and this example of an abusive ALP unit eventually being turned around by community pressure (see [here](#)).

Successful ALP units, ones which usefully protect the local population against the insurgency and do not abuse them, tend to be

where the community has wanted the force and has control over it. (4) They are often in places where the community is homogenous. Often it is in Pashtun areas where it fits best, within the known framework of arbaki or other traditions of setting up temporary, local, tribal defense forces (a study of ALP working in non-Pashtun areas can be read [here](#)).

Where the ALP fails, sometimes catastrophically, is where it exacerbates existing factional, ethnic or tribal rivalries. This most often happens in the north with its long and complex history of militias and militia abuses but has been seen in the south and east as well, including in Pashtun areas. A key sign of danger is when the ALP has been drawn from one of several competing local groups or where it has been co-opted by a powerful politician, commander or faction with clout locally and in Kabul (so giving ALP units effective impunity).

The ALP is now seven years old. Training, command and control and pay have all become fairly standardized over the years as institutional control has grown. Despite continuing abuses by some units, the ALP may be the best that can be hoped for from an Afghan militia. Certainly, all the many other militia forces raised in the post-2001 period, often re-badged and rarely stood down have behaved more badly. One of the issues which is unclear in the ATA proposal is whether this will be an ALP-style set up, as it now exists, with a careful selection of locations and members of ATA units, and reasonable command and control, or actually just a re-badging of militias already in existence which claim to be protecting villagers, but have very different agendas. For a recent example of just such a 'village defense force' which engages in crime and oppression locally, see this piece containing serious allegations against Commander Piran Qul's NDS-funded 'uprising force' in Takhar (see [here](#)).

### **Will the ATA work: questions that need to be asked about setting up a new 'village defense force'?**

As Ghani weighs the decision to stand up the ATA, critical questions should be whether the initiative is likely to work to help protect and stabilize contested areas, and what the potential other consequences of creating such a force might be.

First, it is important to establish the criteria and set out some benchmarks, based on lessons learned. AAN, in partnership with German foreign affairs, think tank GPPI, is currently in the middle of a research project scrutinizing foreign-backed 'militia forces', looking at where they work, where they do not and why. Certain key issues keep recurring to do with effectiveness and accountability, assessed in terms of protecting the community from insurgent attacks and not abusing the local population. Based on past experience with the ALP, before the government or its American backers stand up another village defense force in Afghanistan, the following questions, at least, should be asked.

#### **Who actually chooses the members of the force?**

Claims that defense forces have been chosen by 'the community' have often turned out to be duplicitous. Where locals actually want a defense force and are involved in choosing members, there is a higher likelihood of success.

#### **Are they chosen from one tribe, sub-tribe, ethnic group or faction in a mixed area?**

If so, expect disaster. ALP has worked best where the local community is homogenous or has a history of cooperation on local defense.

Is there a history of militia abuse in the area and/or powerful commanders with strong links to the state/US military and/or a history of war crimes?

If so, expect fresh abuses of civilians, in-fighting with other armed groups, involvement in the drug trade and other criminal enterprise and commanders wanting to re-badge illegal militias as men officially underarms.

#### **Will anyone make money or gain politically out of the force?**

Look for benefits going to local commanders or politicians who often agitate for local forces, regardless of whether they will be of any actual use in protecting people drawn to the money. If the militia is being set up in an area with the potential for it to be used



for drugs or other smuggling activities, expect them to get involved, if only in 'taxing' shipments.

## **Are there elections coming up?**

Be wary of forces being set up purportedly to guard local populations which are actually aimed at getting someone's vote out, whether actual or ballot-stuffed votes. Village defense forces may also actually be aimed at stabilizing an area so that people can vote, but history has taught skepticism on this front.

## **What command and control and accountability mechanisms are in place?**

One tricky issue here is that '*village defense forces*' are supposed to belong to the community and, if set up by the state, to the state, through formal mechanisms, as well. This raises questions about command and control. In general, though, it can be said that we have seen problems arising with both the ALP and uprising forces where communities did not want them in the first place or were not involved in setting them up and where they are not loyal to the local community.

In terms of the state's command and control, ie through the ANP hierarchy, we have seen impunity for units which have stronger, informal links to the factional leaders or politicians who mobilized them and who may be more influential than those supposedly in charge, the ANP district and provincial police chiefs. Control by either community or the MoI can be near impossible in such cases. Accountability for the ALP has improved as a result of eventually determined pressure from the US military and those in charge within the MoI, but it was many years before the political will was there to ensure this.

## **Why is it felt the militia force is needed?**

Is the militia force being set up because this looks easier than fixing other, more fundamental, problems? That might be weaknesses in the ANSF or unpopularity, ineffectiveness, unresponsiveness or corruption in government – local, provincial or national. Creating militias as a short-cut solution to deeper problems has become a familiar pattern since 2001.

## **What happens if things go wrong?**

This question seems rarely to be asked. The government and/or its US military ally have generally established militias apparently with the hope that all will go well while ignoring the possibility of failure or disaster. It is worth taking a cool look at the outset at local politics and demography, land and water disputes and the possibility that arming some people may send the local factional, tribal or ethnic balance out of kilter. The potential long-term costs need to be considered, not just the possible short-term benefits.

## **Is there a date for standing down the force?**

Militias are easier to stand up than they are to stand down.

The bar for raising a new militia force should be very high indeed in Afghanistan, given their troubled history. In a second dispatch, AAN will use these '*lessons learned*' to help analyze the proposed pilot project for the Afghan Territorial Army which, we understand from several sources, would be in the southern Nangrahar districts of Achin and Kot. Might it be viable or lead to further complications and trouble? Achin and Kot are Daesh heartland and center of the US/Afghan battle against the group. It is also where the US military created an earlier militia which went so badly wrong, it helped pave the way for Daesh to secure a base in Afghanistan.

## **A post-script**

Also mentioned in press reporting on the ATA was a plan to set up a new 15,000-strong tribal militia, under the Ministry of Tribal and Border Affairs, modeled, a source in the ministry told AAN, on the tribal border protection force of the Najibullah era. It also existed earlier under the monarchy. The same source said the government was also planning to create a new deputy ministerial post and department within the ministry with the name of Conflict Resolution, Peace, and Reconciliation. The process for creating both department and tribal force would start after parliament approves the acting minister, the former governor of Kandahar (and Nangrahar), Gul Agha Sherzai.

Alarm bells over this proposal should be ringing loudly: in the immediate post-2001 period Sherzai's militia and state forces under his control, in close cooperation with US forces, abused and preyed on former Taleban commanders and tribal and factional rivals of Shirzai's in Kandahar. Influential men who were trying to live in peace found themselves targeted for arrest, torture, and extortion. Some found themselves handed over to US forces as 'terrorists' and sent to Bagram and Guantanamo Bay. Such actions earned Sherzai considerable money in US bounties, as Anand Gopal's masterly work *"The Battle for Afghanistan: Militancy and Conflict in Kandahar"* (see [here](#)) has detailed. Shirzai's rule in Kandahar turned out to be one of the most important factors sparking rebellion and eventually insurgency in the province.

*Edited by Thomas Ruttig, Borhan Osman, and Erica Gaston*

#### **About the Author:**

**Kate Clark** is a journalist associated with [Afghanistan Analysts Network](#). She was stationed in Kabul, Afghanistan in 1999 as a BBC foreign correspondent. On March 14, 2001, the Taliban ordered her expelled. At that time she was the only western reporter stationed full-time in Afghanistan. Her expulsion was seen as a reaction to her reports on the Taliban's destruction of the famous Buddhist statues at Bamiyan.

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#### **References:**

(1) As [Human Rights Watch](#) commented in its press release on the Afghan proposal:

The Indian Territorial Army, the model for this proposed defense force, has been deployed to support Indian counter-insurgency forces in Jammu and Kashmir. Territorial army personnel have been implicated in serious abuses, and its irregular status has contributed to a lack of accountability.

(2) UNAMA pointed out in its 2016 report into the Protection of Civilians in the conflict:

The increased practice of using untrained and unregulated pro-Government armed groups in such operations [against 'anti-government elements'], sometimes to compensate for a lack of Afghan security force personnel, raised serious protection concerns for civilians both during such operations and during the post-operation phase. Pro-Government armed groups lack the training provided to Afghan national security forces and the discipline and accountability imposed through a formal command structure...

UNAMA continued to receive reports of Government authorities' unwillingness or inability to control the illegal activities of pro-Government armed groups due to their reliance on such groups to fight against Anti-Government Elements and the protection provided to some groups by powerful political figures. The use of irregular government militias operating outside a well-defined chain of command increases the risk that such groups exploit a fragile security environment, further compounding the protection risks faces by civilians and the possibility of human rights abuses. UNAMA urges the Government once again to disband pro-Government armed groups and dismantle the political patronage of such groups.

(3) One US expert group with top-level access to the ALP and the US military in 2013 said that ALP units ranged from "highly effective" – enhancing local security, undermining insurgent influence, and facilitating governance and development – to those "causing more harm than good to the counterinsurgency" – ineffective, predatory, or engaged in collusion with the enemy. It reported the US SOF's own assessment, as one third of ALP units being effective, one third counter-productive and one third somewhere in between. (Mark Moyer, Ronald E Neumann, Vanda Felbab-Brown, William Knarr, Jack Guy, Terry Corner and Carter Malkasian, "The Afghan Local Police Community Self-Defense in Transition," Center for Special Operations Studies and Research, Joint Special Operations University, August 2013, unpublished, but seen by AAN).

(4) Often, better ALP were marked out also by good training by US Special Operations Forces (SOF) who, in the early days, 'embedded in the community'. This was not always the case, however.

(5) Another aspect of the shuffling of the ANSF pack aimed at bringing the paramilitary elements of the ANP, the paramilitary Afghan National Civil Order Police (ANCOP) and parts of the Afghan National Border Police (ANBP) from MoI to MoD command is partly being done to try to ease them into a less corrupt environment.

#### Annex: A brief history of militia forces in Afghanistan

This is an edited version taken from a literature review by AAN and GPPi which looked at local, community or sub-state forces in Afghanistan. Full details and sourcing is available [here](#).

It is not the first time that central government or its backers have sought to fill in gaps in state forces by setting up militias. Soviet-backed Presidents Karmal and Najibullah took this route in the 1980s: this was, for example, the origin of (now Vice-President) General Abdul Rashid Dostum's Jombesh movement; also forces under current Kandahar police chief Abdul Razeq were formerly a 1980s militia in that province, under the lead of Ismatullah Muslim. (Muslim's militia was a mujahedin group that 'joined the government'.) The militias then were set up to keep the mujahedin at bay, but the litany of their abuses was long (read more about it in the Afghanistan Justice Project's project). Many would also argue that many of the mujahedin forces, by the 1990s, had turned into little more than militia forces, with some having better command and control than others, but all accused of gross human rights abuses, war crimes and infighting (again, see the Afghanistan Justice Project report for detail on this).

Since 2001, irregular forces have regularly been established or backed by international military forces or set up by the Afghan government. They have included:

##### 2001-2005

In 2001, the US military and CIA armed and funded the factions of the Northern Alliance and various Pashtun commanders to fight the Taliban. Some had been fighting the Taliban previously and were involved in fierce battles in the autumn of 2001; others were re-mobilized immediately after the start of the US-led intervention and simply drove into areas vacated by the fleeing Taliban and seized power locally. Under the new administration led by Hamed Karzai, those forces were re-named as the **Afghan Military Forces (AMF)** and put under Ministry of Defence (then under the control of the Shura-ye Nazar network within Jamiat-e Islami which presented their forces, at least, as a continuation of the old pre-Taliban Islamic State of Afghanistan army); it imposed a notional, formal structure of eight corps with divisions, garrisons, and other divisions: the tashkil was for about 200,000 men, although in practice many were ghost soldiers (with salaries paid into other pockets).

In practice, the AMF were often little more than re-hatted militias still loyal to their pre-2001 commanders and with little central command and control (see Human Rights Watch reporting on their many cases of abuse [here](#)). From 2003, a nationwide programme of Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR) thinned out some of the AMF ranks while a new military force, the Afghan National Army (ANA), was created from scratch with a deliberate mixing of ethnic groups. However, DDR largely failed to demobilize the militias of the AMF, and many of its elements were incorporated into the Afghan National Police (ANP). Others, never integrated into the AMF or other state forces, continued fighting alongside the US Special Operations Forces and CIA and were often referred to collectively as '**campaign forces**', for example, the Kandahar Strike Force, the Afghan Security Guards in Paktika and the Khost Protection Force, which still operates, (at least according to the latest reports) under CIA control. The campaign forces were notoriously abusive, with their relationship to US forces making them 'beyond the law' (see details [here](#) and [here](#)).

Both ISAF and the US military's counter-terrorism mission used local militias to guard bases or as partners in operations, despite local people's dismay; they had hoped ISAF would protect them from local militias, not partner them; the various local ad hoc arrangements were formalised in 2003 and they became known as the **Afghan Security Force (ASF)**. The ASF was largely demobilized in 2006 when reporting suggests it numbered about 2,500 fighters, 90 per cent of whom joined the ANA or the Afghan National Police (ANP).

##### 2005-2009

From about 2005 onwards, with the outbreak of the insurgency, ISAF expansion and later 'the surge' (the increase in US troops to almost one hundred thousand in 2009-2012) and the absence of a strong ANSF, the international military needed Afghan forces to guard bases and convoys and gave out contracts worth millions of dollars for this purpose. Many of the old militias were 're-hatted' as guards in **Private Security Companies (PSCs)** which were licensed from 2006 onwards by the notoriously corrupt Ministry of Interior, and owned by relatives or close allies of the most powerful figures in government. These militias were extremely powerful and well-connected and were described as running a "protection racket" in a US House of Representatives report; money was siphoned off into private pockets, including the Taliban's.

Increasingly unhappy with the power and money being channeled into non-state militias, President Karzai demanded the guard forces be regularised and brought under state control. From 2009, onwards, PSCs began to be replaced by guards from a



state-owned enterprise within the Ministry of Interior, the Afghan Public Protection Force (APPF); there was pressure from commanders and strongmen to get 'their men' into this force.

From 2005, onwards, there was also increasing experimentation with irregular fighting forces. In response to Karzai's request to create 'tribal militias', the NATO funded and the US trained the **Afghanistan National Auxiliary Police (ANAP)** in 2006, as a temporary counter-Taleban force in southern Afghanistan; it was highly corrupt. Like the PSCs, it also ended up legalizing illegal militias, bringing groups loyal to local governors into the official sphere. Following extensive international criticism and reports of Taleban infiltration, it was quietly shut down in 2008.

2009 to date

From 2009, onwards, the US military, especially the SOF, began to pioneer 'village defense forces'. The first was the **Afghan Public Protection Program (AP3)** in 2009, initially funded and implemented by US SOF in coordination with the Ministry of Interior (Mol) under Hanif Atmar (now National Security Advisor) in four districts of Wardak province. Overlapping with AP3, US Special Operations Forces set up various different community defense forces in southern Afghanistan, which were originally called the **Local Defense Initiative (LDI)**, aka **Community Defense Initiative (LDI/CDI)**. These **Village Stability Operations (VSOs)** would eventually morph into the Afghan Local Police (ALP), which was officially authorized in August 2010 under the Mol. Still US-funded, it is a 28,000 strong force and present in most provinces.

Other international forces also supported local defense organizations or militias in their areas of operation. The **Critical Infrastructure Protection Program (CIPP)** which operated in four, possibly five northern provinces, was set up in August 2011 as a joint German-US military initiative, using money from an American discretionary fund. There was also the **Intermediate Security for Critical Infrastructure (ISCI)** in Marja, Helmand (set up by U.S. marines), and **Community-Based Security Solutions (CBSS)** set up in three eastern provinces. All were disbanded or absorbed into the ALP in 2012 after Karzai heard about their existence and banned them.

There have also been initiatives to establish militias by the government which did not get international funding, such as the **Community Defense Force (CDF)** established by President Karzai and funded by the Ministry of Interior ahead of the 2009 presidential elections, on paper to provide security to polling stations, but actually to help get the Karzai vote out.

The government has been establishing what it calls National Uprising Groups (patsunian or Khezesh-e Mardomi), to fill the (supposedly temporarily) security gap in places too remote for the ANSF or even the ALP to operate. They fall under no Afghan legal framework, but various parts of the government are reported to hire and arm them, particularly the NDS.

In addition to the ALP program and the national uprising forces, there remain a large number of 'pro-government militias', as they are termed by UNAMA. These are militias which are mobilized and on occasion fight for the government, and often refer to themselves as 'ALP' but have no formal position.